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SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: VATICAN CALLS ANTI-SEMITISM "A PLAGUE THAT MUST BE CURED"

1. (U) THE HOLY SEE HAS REEMPHASIZED THE NEED TO UPROOT DISCRIMINATION AND ANTI-SEMITISM IN A NEW DOCUMENT MARKING THE CELEBRATION OF JEWISH CULTURE IN EUROPE. ISSUED BY GERMAN-BORN CARDINAL WALTER KASPER, THE HEAD OF THE VATICAN OFFICE RESPONSIBLE FOR RELATIONS WITH JUDAISM, THE PAPER REITERATES RECENT VATICAN ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF THE ROLE CHRISTIANS PLAYED IN FOMENTING THE ANTI-SEMITIC SENTIMENT THAT CULMINATED IN "THE HORRENDOUS SLAUGHTER OF THE SHOAH."

2. (U) IN THE NEW DOCUMENT, KASPER AFFIRMED THAT ERRONEOUS INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE RESULTED IN ANTI-SEMITIC DISCRIMINATION, PARTICULARLY IN CHRISTIAN EUROPE, AND THAT THIS BECAME MORE PREVALENT IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY WHEN IT ASSUMED A "SOCIOPOLITICAL" RATHER THAN A RELIGIOUS CHARACTER. THE CARDINAL ACKNOWLEDGES THAT CHRISTIANS DID NOT ADEQUATELY OPOSE THE IDEOLOGICAL PREMISES THAT RESULTED IN THE SHOAH AND POINTS OUT THAT "INFLUENTIAL" CATHOLIC JOURNALS PUBLISHED ANTI-SEMITIC ARTICLES. KASPER QUOTES FROM THE HOLY SEE'S 1998 DOCUMENT ON THE SHOAH THAT THE CHRISTIAN RESPONSE, "WAS NOT WHAT ONE WOULD HAVE EXPECTED FROM THE DISCIPLES OF CHRIST."

3. (U) FOR KASPER, THE APPROPRIATE RESPONSE FOR THE HOLY SEE TO THIS LEGACY IS "A PENITENTIAL PROCESS" -- EXEMPLARY AND CONCRETE ACTIONS THAT SHOW THAT PRESENT MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH SHARE IN THE SINS OF THE PAST. HE POINTS OUT THAT PENITENTIAL GESTURES AND LAUDABLE OFFICIAL STATEMENTS FROM THE POPE AND THE HOLY SEE MUST BE MATCHED AT THE GRASS-ROOTS LEVEL. KASPER CALLS FOR A RELIGIOUS DIMENSION TO COMBAT ANTI-SEMITISM THAT GOES BEYOND THE CULTURAL, SOCIAL, POLITICAL OR IDEOLOGICAL LEVEL, AND PLACES CHRISTIANS AND JEWS ON AN EQUAL PLAIN AS THE "CHOSEN PEOPLE." IN DOING SO, KASPER IS ESSENTIALLY REWRITING A 1928 HOLY SEE STATEMENT THAT REPUDIATED DISCRIMINATION AGAINST THE "AT ONE TIME CHOSEN PEOPLE." INSTEAD, KASPER ASSERTS THAT JUDAISM'S STATUS AS A CHOSEN PEOPLE MEANS CHRISTIANS AND JEWS ARE BOUND IN A FORM OF IRREVOCABLE ALLIANCE THAT CALLS BOTH TO A UNIVERSAL VOCATION TO SERVE HUMANITY IN PEACE AND JUSTICE. KASPER BASES FUTURE RELATIONS BETWEEN JEWS AND CHRISTIANS ON THE HONEST ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF THE ROLE CHRISTIANS PLAYED IN THE ORIGIN AND DIFFUSION OF ANTI-SEMITIC ATTITUDES.

4. (SBU) COMMENT: CARDINAL KASPER IS THE DRIVING FORCE BEHIND THE HOLY SEE'S RELATIONS WITH JUDAISM AND HIS GERMAN ORIGIN MAKES HIM A SENSITIVE INTERLOCUTOR ON ANTI-SEMITISM ISSUES. HIS PAPER, PUBLISHED SEPTEMBER 8 IN THE VATICAN'S SEMI-OFFICIAL DAILY, L'OSSERVATORE ROMANO, INDICATES THAT EFFORTS TO COMBAT ANTI-SEMITISM, INCLUDING BY ACKNOWLEDGING CHRISTIAN COMPLICITY IN SHAPING NEGATIVE EUROPEAN ATTITUDES TOWARDS JUDAISM REMAIN HIGH ON THE HOLY SEE'S AGENDA AND ARE STILL A KEY THEME OF JOHN PAUL II'S PAPACY. WHILE HIGH-LEVEL STATEMENTS AND SYMBOLIC GESTURES HAVE PROVIDED A CLEAR PUBLIC INDICATION OF THE HOLY SEE'S POSITION ON ANTI-SEMITISM AND HAVE REAFFIRMED GUIDELINES FOR THE FAITHFUL, THE VATICAN RECOGNIZES THAT THESE NEED TO BE TRANSFORMED INTO ACTION AMONG THE WIDER CHURCH MEMBERSHIP. WHILE THERE HAVE BEEN SOME EDUCATIONAL EXCHANGES, UNIVERSITY COURSES ENCOMPASSING CHRISTIAN-JEWISH ISSUES, AND AN ARRAY OF INTER-RELIGIOUS DISCUSSIONS, KASPER UNDERSTANDS THAT MORE SIMILAR INITIATIVES FROM CATHOLIC COMMUNITIES IN EUROPE WILL BE NEEDED TO OVERCOME THE PLAGUE OF ANTI-SEMITISM. END COMMENT.

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